

# Sussex Tech teacher named Delaware's 2018 Teacher of the Year

*Virginia Forcucci becomes Delaware's nominee in national competition*



A high school English teacher from the Sussex Technical School District is Delaware's 2018 State Teacher of the Year.

Governor John Carney made the announcement tonight at the annual banquet honoring the 20 district and charter teachers of the year at Dover Downs Hotel and Conference Center in Dover.

Virginia "Jinni" Forcucci became an educator because of her love of literature, but her students are the inspiration for her 20-year career.

Met with blank stares and a collective sense of disinterest on her first days in the classroom, Forcucci questioned her curricula, her strategies and her motivation for becoming a teacher, she said.

It took a challenging student to show her that the problem wasn't her lessons – it was her approach. What she viewed as

apathy in her learners was more likely insecurity, inability or misdirection, she said. Her students needed advocates, and Forcucci became their biggest.

Forcucci uses literature “to overturn perspectives, to generate critical thought and fruitful discussion, and, ultimately and inevitably in her classroom, to change lives,” Zoe James-Collins said in a letter nominating her former teacher for the state honor. “My classmates and I would often joke that her class was like church: We’d leave her sanctuary each day renewed, enlightened and inspired to be a better person ... for many of us, she was the agent of change she urged us to be.”

Her colleagues see the connections she makes with students, too.

“Whether she’s laughing so hard at a clever comment from a class clown or suffering along with a student as they share their darkest moment in a piece for creative writing, Virginia Forcucci will cry. Her passion shows through tears,” Anthony Natoli, another English instructor at Sussex Tech, said in his nomination letter. “That’s what makes Virginia Forcucci special. That’s what makes her an incredible educator. That’s what makes her an incredible person.”

Forcucci said she found what best motivates learning is demanding content, freedom to explore and academic discourse. With this discovery, she redesigned her curricula, enhancing rigor and relying more on student-driven discussions. Even her most resistant learners responded.

As a teacher, Forcucci works to encourage her students to understand all sides of an argument before formulating a perspective and to seek common ground as they search for a resolution.

“We live in a climate right now where lines are often drawn in the sand. Instead of listening to one another, we’re thinking

about what to say. Instead of considering the perspective of 'the other,' we judge or we ignore," Forcucci said. "Sitting in a circle, my seniors debate media's impact on race relations, the need for solitude in self-discovery, the absence of cultural literacy in our schools, and I'm inspired."

Teachers, she said, must be good examples for their students: "We must maintain high expectations for our students, model compassion and reward exploration. My sincere hope is that when we devote ourselves to life-long learning and empathy, our students will, too."

Forcucci inherits from outgoing Teacher of the Year Wendy Turner the responsibility of representing all teachers in Delaware. She will address community groups, business leaders, legislators, and educational organizations to inform the public about the status of Delaware schools. She also will become Delaware's candidate in the National Teacher of the Year Program, a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers sponsored by the Voya Foundation.

By action of the General Assembly, she will receive a \$5,000 grant to use for the educational benefit of her students, as well two personal grants totaling an additional \$5,000. [The remaining 19 school district/charter candidates](#) each will receive a personal grant of \$2,000.

Forcucci also will receive: a \$1,000 grant for educational/classroom use from American Institutes for Research; grants from the Delaware State Education Association and the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce; a State of Delaware Teacher of the Year commemorative plate from the Division of Motor Vehicles; free graduate-level courses from Delaware's higher education institutions, including a full doctorate program from Wilmington University; a gold watch from the Delaware State Teachers of the Year Association; a 10-karat gold ring from Jostens; and lunch in Washington D.C.

with U.S. Sen. Tom Carper.

Other organizations that honored the newly-selected Teacher of the Year include: the Delaware Chief School Officers Association, Delaware Association of School Administrators, Delaware School Boards Association, Delaware State University, Wesley College, Educators Rising and Advantech Incorporated.

This year's celebration was sponsored in part by Voya Financial.

**Media Contact:** Alison May, [alison.may@doe.k12.de.us](mailto:alison.may@doe.k12.de.us), (302) 735-4006